



HUNTING WILD TURKEYS *in Missouri*



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Acknowledgements

Written by Jason Isabelle, with Jake Hindman and Lauren Hildreth.
Edited by Larry Archer. Michael W. Hubbard, Robert A. Pierce II, and
Larry D. Vangilder provided review of this publication. Designed by
Marci Porter. Portions of this publication have been adapted from
University of Missouri Extension Guide G9526, *Wild Turkey Biology
and Habitat Management in Missouri*, which is available online at
extensiondata.missouri.edu/pub/pdf/agguides/wildlife/g09526.pdf.



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Published by the Missouri Department of Conservation,
PO Box 180, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102–1080

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Wild turkeys are one of Missouri's most cherished wildlife resources. Turkey hunting is a popular activity in the Show-Me State, with approximately 150,000 hunters heading to the field in pursuit of this bird each spring. Turkeys are also a favorite species of photographers and wildlife viewers, attracting thousands of visitors annually to Missouri's public lands.

The restoration of wild turkeys is considered by many to be one of the greatest success stories of wildlife conservation. MDC estimates Missouri's turkey population exceeds 300,000 birds, but it wasn't that long ago that turkeys nearly disappeared due to habitat loss and unrestricted hunting. Through an extensive trap-and-transfer effort, better stewardship, regulated harvests, and the cooperation of citizens, wild turkey populations have recovered throughout the state.

The resurgence of the wild turkey in Missouri during the past half century has rekindled interest in this splendid bird. A new generation of turkey hunters enters the woods with the hope of harvesting one of the most prized North American game birds, while veteran hunters continue to participate in the challenge and tradition of turkey hunting. Others simply enjoy learning about and watching this magnificent bird.

MDC manages the state's wild turkey population and the habitat it depends on to ensure they remain a permanent fixture on Missouri's landscape. Through setting harvest regulations, MDC also provides opportunities for Missourians and our guests to engage in the exciting pursuit that is wild turkey hunting.





HISTORY OF WILD TURKEYS IN MISSOURI

Missouri is home to the eastern subspecies of wild turkey. Historically, turkeys were found throughout the state with numbers estimated to be between 250,000 to 400,000 birds. During the mid-to-late 1800s, historians recorded “too many wild turkeys even to consider raising tame birds” and “turkeys so numerous and easily obtained as to be scarcely worthy of consideration.” However, just 60 years later, unregulated harvest, extensive deforestation, uncontrolled burning, and free-range grazing brought the wild turkey to near extinction in Missouri. By the early 1950s, Missouri’s turkey population had been reduced to fewer than 3,000 birds, with most being limited to remote portions of the Ozarks.

Beginning in the mid-1920s, the Missouri Fish and Game Department attempted to halt the turkey decline by releasing game farm turkeys. Additionally, the hunting season for turkeys was closed in 1937. However, turkey numbers still decreased, and research, which began in the late 1930s, showed that releasing game farm turkeys was not the answer to Missouri’s turkey problem. Instead, researchers determined that capturing wild turkeys and relocating them to portions of the state with suitable habitat would be more successful.

To ensure a source of wild birds, MDC purchased Peck Ranch Conservation Area, a large tract of land in the southern Ozarks where there were still a few native wild turkeys. With protection for the birds provided, and their habitat restored, turkey numbers increased, demonstrating that turkeys could be abundant again if the landscape was managed properly. By 1954, the population on Peck Ranch CA had increased from nine turkeys to 32. Trapping began in 1957 on an intensively managed portion of the ranch that supported about 100 birds.

Despite having a source of wild turkeys, an efficient method of turkey trapping still needed to be developed. Researchers adapted cannon nets used for capturing waterfowl and lured turkeys in front of the net with bait. This technique greatly increased trapping efficiency by allowing the capture of large groups of wild turkeys at once.

Finding suitable release sites involved many factors. Strong public support was important, so communities were encouraged to submit restocking requests, and the requests were evaluated for general habitat conditions. Early in the restoration program, researchers considered a ratio of 70 percent forest to 30 percent open land over a minimum area of 15,000 acres to be optimal habitat for turkeys. In addition to considerations of habitat suitability, citizens living within these release areas had to agree to protect the birds.

Initiated in 1954, Missouri’s turkey restoration effort would span more than two decades. When MDC completed the restoration effort in 1979, more than 2,600 turkeys had been released on over 200 sites throughout the state. In less than a half century, Missouri’s turkey population had gone from the brink of extinction to an estimated population of over 300,000 birds, among the largest in the nation.

In addition to establishing populations throughout the state, Missouri has made important contributions to turkey restoration programs in other states by trading Missouri turkeys for many other wildlife species. Since the early 1960s, Missouri has traded turkeys for ruffed grouse, otters, pheasants, greater prairie-chickens, and various fish species.





BIOLOGY OF WILD TURKEYS

Physical Characteristics

Wild turkeys are the largest game birds in North America. Adult males, commonly called gobblers or toms, typically weigh from 17 to 30 pounds, and adult females, or hens, weigh from 8 to 12 pounds. A young male is called a jake, and a female is a jenny. Turkeys are gallinaceous birds, a group that includes pheasants, quail, and grouse. These birds have relatively short beaks and wings, feed and nest on the ground, and have young that leave the nest shortly after hatching.

In addition to being larger than hens, gobblers have a colorful, unfeathered head that is red, white, and blue. Males have black-tipped breast feathers and a feather-like appendage, called a beard, protruding above their breast. Gobblers also have a sharp bony spur on the lower portion of each leg, which they use when fighting other males. In addition to their smaller size, hens are more drab-colored than males, with buff-tipped breast feathers, which help to conceal them when nesting. Their head is predominately blue and has a feather tract that extends up the back of the neck. While a few hens will have beards, the various physical characteristics

mentioned above make it relatively easy to distinguish between the sexes.

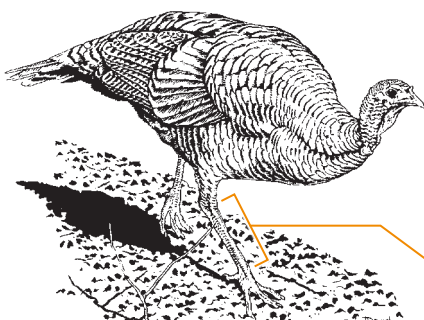
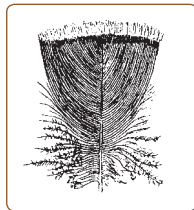
There are several characteristics that help to differentiate adults from juvenile turkeys. Adult turkeys have tail fans that are symmetrical, whereas the middle four to six feathers of a juvenile's tail fan are longer than the outside feathers. The white barring of the ninth and 10th primary wing feathers of adult turkeys extends all the way to the tips. In juvenile turkeys, the feather tips are more pointed than adults, and the white barring does not extend to the tip of the 10th, and sometimes ninth, primary wing feather. Most gobblers have beards that are at least 8 inches long. During the spring, a jake's beard is typically only 3 to 4 inches long. A gobbler's spurs are typically at least three-quarters of an inch long, whereas a jake's spurs average about one-fourth of an inch long during the spring. Juvenile turkeys also weigh considerably less than adults, and a jake harvested during the spring season can weigh as little as half as much as a gobbler.

HEN

DROPPINGS
curled



BREAST FEATHERS
buff-tipped



Mainly blue

Usually no beard

Appears rusty

Less than 4.5 inches

No spurs

4.5 inches

HEAD

BEARD

BREAST

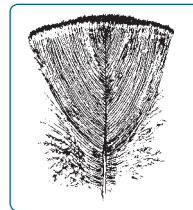
FOOT

SPURS

TARSUS

GOBBLER

BREAST FEATHERS
black-tipped



DROPPINGS
J-shaped



Mainly red

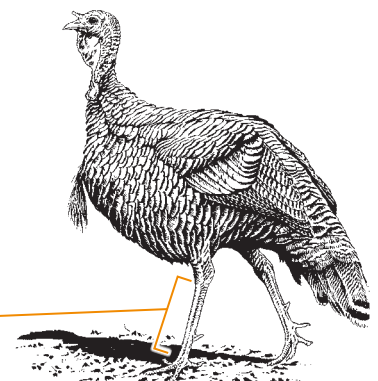
Long tassel-like *

Appears black

Greater than 4.5 inches

Usually ¾ inch or more *

6 inches



* **JAKES** have spurs less than ½ inch long and a beard less than 6 inches long.



The Seasons

Spring and Summer

Turkey behaviors change as the spring breeding season draws nearer. Male turkeys begin to gobble before leaving their tree roosts at daylight. Although late April is the peak time for gobbling in Missouri during most years, the first gobbles of the year are often heard in March. In addition to gobbling, toms spend brief periods strutting for hens and fighting with other males to determine social status and to establish dominance.

During the breeding season, turkeys spend considerable time in open areas. As hens feed in openings like pastures and crop fields, it is common to see gobblers strutting alongside them. Turkeys readily eat green grasses (both the blades and seeds) and forbs (flowering plants) when feeding in these areas. In addition to openings, turkeys feed in forested areas that have open canopies, which promotes growth of plants in the understory. Buttercups, wood sorrel, sheep sorrel, and early-maturing blue grasses are preferred foods during spring and early summer. In addition to eating plants, hens readily eat insects for the protein and calcium needed for egg production. Turkeys eat a variety of invertebrates including grasshoppers, walking-sticks, beetles, ants, and spiders.

Hens typically begin laying eggs in early April. They nest in areas with a dense understory that is about 2 to 3 feet tall, often consisting of grasses, forbs, or shrubs. Vegetation at nest sites offers visual protection from predators. These areas may also help contain a hen's scent and cover the sounds made as she turns her eggs while incubating. Abandoned fields (commonly called old fields), thinned forests, and rights-of-way are all common nest sites. Hens often locate their nests near a water source, and especially like to nest along an edge where an opening meets a forested area.

Brood Survey

MDC needs volunteers to participate in its wild turkey brood survey. Using cards provided, participants record observations of hens and poults throughout the summer. Researchers use the information gathered to gauge the hatch of Missouri's wild turkey population.

It's easy to participate. Just send your name and complete mailing address to: **Wild Turkey Brood Survey; Missouri Department of Conservation; 3500 E. Gans Road; Columbia, MO 65201**. We'll send you three observation cards on which to record your turkey sightings during June, July, and August. At the end of each month, just drop the postage-paid card in the mail.

It takes a hen about two weeks to lay a clutch of about 11 eggs, after which she begins incubating. The incubation period lasts about 28 days, during which hens spend about 22 to 23 hours a day on the nest, leaving only to eat, drink, and defecate. Despite the camouflaged eggs and dense vegetation in which hens nest, predators find most turkey nests each year. Hens often attempt to establish another nest if their first nesting attempt is unsuccessful. Third nesting attempts in a single year are uncommon.

Most young turkeys, called poults, hatch in late May and early June. Although poults are very mobile and can feed themselves soon after hatching, they cannot fly until about two weeks of age. During this time, they spend nights on the ground and are quite vulnerable to predators and cold, wet weather. Once poults begin roosting off the ground, their chances of survival increase considerably. However, most turkeys do not survive their first couple weeks.

After a brood hatches, a hen takes its poults to what is called brood-rearing habitat. These areas typically consist of knee-high grasses and forbs, most often located in openings such as pastures, hayfields, abandoned fields, and rights-of-way. Open areas are generally better for brood-rearing because they provide more insects than forested areas. However, forested areas with scattered trees and

Wild Turkey Life Cycle Timetable												
Activity	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Flocks break up												
Gobbling begins; 1 st peak early April												
Gobbling continues; 2 nd peak late April												
Courtship/mating												
Peak nesting												
Broods appear												
Brood flocks form												
Gobblers seen in small flocks												

an understory of grasses, forbs, and shrubs (also known as savannas and woodlands) can provide great brood-rearing habitat. The key aspects of good brood-rearing areas are an abundance of insects, tall enough vegetation to provide cover for poults yet good visibility for the hen, and proximity to areas where broods can rest when not feeding. Native vegetation provides better brood habitat than exotic cool-season grasses, like fescue, because it provides a greater diversity of invertebrate food items and is easier for poults to forage in.

For the first month, a poult’s diet consists almost entirely of insects. In contrast, adults eat mostly plants. During summer, turkeys can often be seen stripping seed heads of grasses, which are a favorite food item. Turkeys also readily consume soft

mast, or fruits, including blackberries, wild grapes, and plums, which are typically found in openings or along their edges.

Fall and Winter

As summer transitions into fall, turkeys shift their range to take advantage of seasonally available foods like acorns. Hens and their young remain together, as they do for much of the winter. Gobblers remain in separate flocks. The size of area a turkey flock uses during fall depends on the availability of food. When acorns are plentiful, turkeys typically have small fall and winter home ranges. When acorns are scarce, the range and daily movements of turkeys increase considerably. Turkeys eat acorns from a range of oak species including black, blackjack,



red, post, scarlet, white, and pin. Turkeys also eat a variety of soft mast during fall, including persimmons, sumac, viburnum, hawthorn, and flowering dogwood. Although turkeys tend to spend most of the fall in forested areas, they also feed in agricultural fields, especially during years when few acorns are produced.

Turkeys spend the winter in large flocks, often with more than 20 birds in a single group. As in fall, the availability of food dictates winter turkey movement, and turkeys will often shift their range to take advantage of a food source. Turkeys spend a great deal of time feeding in agricultural fields during winter and readily use corn and soybean fields. In the more heavily forested parts of the state, turkeys forage under oak trees. As during fall, acorns represent the most preferred food item. Even in areas of the state dominated by agricultural fields, turkeys tend to spend most of the winter feeding in forested areas during years when acorns are abundant.

While not actively feeding during winter, turkeys spend considerable time resting to conserve energy. Turkeys commonly feed for a period and then retreat to an area where they can be protected from the winter weather. This might include feeding in an agricultural field and then resting in the forest along the field edge. During periods of persistently cold weather, turkeys prefer to retreat to the thermal cover of evergreen trees, like cedars.

By late winter, jakes begin to separate from the brood flocks they have been part of since the previous summer. These young males often form their own flocks or sometimes join flocks with gobblers. As spring approaches and winter flocks disband, turkeys typically travel 1 to 3 miles to their spring range — juveniles often travel farther. Weather affects the timing of this seasonal movement, with delayed movements occurring during years when snow and cold temperatures linger into spring.



Factors that Affect Turkey Populations

Hen Survival

Hen survival can vary considerably from year to year and is usually lowest during the spring and summer. Nesting and rearing poults takes a lot of energy and puts hens at great risk of predation. In Missouri, fall and winter survival is often higher than during other seasons due to the mild climate and abundant food supply of acorns and waste grain. Only about half to two-thirds of the hens in the population survive to the following year. Scientists say that turkey populations “turn over” about every three years, resulting in a population consisting mostly of new turkeys every few years.

Nest Success

Nest success is one of the most important factors affecting turkey populations. Wet weather during the nesting season tends to decrease nest success. Hens that are wet during incubation give off more odor than they would if they were dry, making it easier for predators to locate them and their nests. Hens’ physical condition also influences the success of their nests. Hens in better condition produce more high-quality eggs, which results in poults that have a greater chance of survival.

Poult Survival

As with hen survival and nest success, poult survival can vary considerably each year. Typically, less than half of the turkeys that hatch will survive their first two weeks. Like nest success, poult survival is influenced by weather. Cold, wet weather early in the brood-rearing period reduces poult survival. However, excessively dry summers can reduce the availability of insects, which are the poults’ primary food source. A moderate amount of precipitation during summer is likely best for the survival of turkey poults.

Habitat

Habitat quantity and quality affect wild turkeys greatly. Animals in good physical condition are most likely to survive, so having habitats that allow turkeys to meet their needs is critical to the population's well-being. Nest success tends to be higher when greater amounts of cover are available. To promote high survival of poults, hens must have access to quality brood-rearing habitats. Influencing these factors directly affects the turkey population and is the most effective way for landowners to increase turkey numbers on their property.

Predators

Predator populations also influence turkey populations. Turkeys have been trying to avoid predators for as long as they've existed. Many of the characteristics that turkeys possess are the result of adaptations to avoid predators. For example, hens blend in well with their surroundings, nest at a young age, lay large clutches, and can renest if their first nests fail. Common predators of adult turkeys include coyotes, bobcats, and great horned owls. Raccoons, opossums, skunks, and snakes commonly eat turkey eggs. Hawks, foxes, and many of the animals that prey on adult turkeys also prey on poults.

Diseases

Although there are many diseases that can affect turkeys, very few have the potential to cause widespread declines in turkey numbers. MDC biologists keep records of wild turkey disease reports and submit carcasses for necropsy to determine their cause when they do occur. Private citizens can prevent the introduction or spread of disease to wild turkey populations by never releasing pen-raised turkeys into the wild. Pen-raised turkeys have the potential to carry several parasites and infectious disease agents that can pose considerable threat to wild turkey populations. Releasing pen-raised turkeys is also illegal in Missouri.

Avian pox

The most commonly reported disease in turkey populations is avian pox. This viral disease occurs in many other birds and causes wartlike growths on the unfeathered portions of the body. In rare cases, avian pox can cause localized declines in turkey numbers if the infection rate is high enough, but it is not likely to cause large-scale population declines. The virus is transmitted by mosquitoes and biting flies and through ingestion of the wartlike growths shed from infected birds. The virus is often not fatal as the growths caused by the virus can disappear within two to three months.

Lymphoproliferative Disease Virus

Lymphoproliferative disease virus is another common virus in turkey populations. Although prevalence of the virus is relatively high in turkey populations, disease caused by the virus is rare. Most turkeys infected with the virus appear perfectly healthy and give no indication that the virus is affecting them adversely. Should the disease develop, it can cause internal lesions on organs and external lesions that look similar to those caused by the avian pox virus. Although lymphoproliferative disease virus was only first discovered in wild turkey populations in 2009, and there is much to be learned about the disease, evidence suggests that it is not likely to have population-level effects.

Histomoniasis

Histomoniasis, commonly referred to as blackhead, is another disease that can affect wild turkeys. Like avian pox, this disease affects many other species of birds. Unlike avian pox, histomoniasis is caused by a parasitic infection. This disease usually leads to mortality of infected individuals, but is reported rather infrequently in wild turkey populations. Like other diseases of wild turkeys, reports of large-scale population declines due to histomoniasis are uncommon.

Avian pox



Lymphoproliferative disease



Lymphoproliferative disease





BEFORE THE HUNT

Private Land Management

With knowledge of habitat types that turkeys require, private landowners can implement habitat management practices that benefit turkeys on their property. Begin by assessing habitat conditions, identifying any limiting factors, and then planning to address them.

Evaluate Your Property and Create a Plan

Food and cover for wild turkeys can be enhanced through various habitat management practices, such as timber harvesting, timber stand improvement, prescribed burning, disking, or managing a forest or woodland to improve mast production. A habitat evaluation can help landowners determine the management practices that will improve their property for turkeys. When evaluating habitat conditions, assess both the strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the seasonal needs of turkeys. In doing so, limiting factors will become apparent, allowing you to determine which management practices will address these issues.

To evaluate the habitat on your property, an aerial photograph is helpful. The photographs can help determine the acreage of each habitat type, such as the acres of cedars, hardwoods, and open land (e.g., cropland, old fields, and pastures). When considering the limiting factors for turkeys, remember to consider adjacent properties and the resources they provide.

Develop a Habitat Map

You can use aerial photographs to create a habitat map, which will help you evaluate your property and develop a habitat management plan. You can use the photographs to delineate property boundaries and roads, to identify openings, drainages, and forest types, and to note acreages that are going to be modified for other future land uses.

Managing Forests for Turkeys

The overstory of most forested areas in Missouri is dominated by oak and hickory trees. Although hickory nuts can relieve some of the pressure put on the acorn crop, oaks are by far a more beneficial tree for turkeys. Most oaks begin to bear acorns between 20 to 25 years of age, but the best mast-producing years are from age 50 to 100 years, when the trees are at least 14 inches in diameter. Given the importance of acorns to turkeys and many other wildlife species, it is important to have mast-producing oak trees on the forested portions of your property. By having a good distribution of various sized oaks, you will ensure acorn production into the future. White oak acorns also mature



Habitat Management Assistance

Because properties can vary considerably, knowing the best course for managing wildlife habitat can be daunting. MDC private land conservationists, wildlife biologists, foresters, fisheries biologists, and conservation agents can offer management recommendations that will help you reach your goals. In addition to providing sound habitat management advice, staff stays up-to-date on federal, state, and other cost-share programs that may help offset the cost of management practices. To find your local MDC contacts, call the nearest regional office listed in the back of this book or visit mdc.mo.gov.

Other Resources

One-on-one contact with an MDC employee is usually the best source of information for landowners, but other sources abound. The University of Missouri Extension's guide, *Wild Turkey Biology and Habitat Management in Missouri*, is available at extensiondata.missouri.edu/pub/pdf/agguides/wildlife/g09526.pdf. MDC offers several habitat management guides, including *Wildlife Management for Missouri Landowners*, *Forest Management for Missouri Landowners*, and *On the Edge*, a guide to bobwhite quail management. These publications are available at MDC offices and online at mdc.mo.gov.



in one growing season, whereas red oak acorns take two years to mature. Therefore, having a good mix of white and red oaks is the key to providing a consistent supply of acorns.

Many forests in Missouri are overstocked, which means they are crowded with too many trees. Being overstocked restricts sunlight from reaching the forest floor and limits the growth of plants that are beneficial to turkeys. Timber stand improvement (TSI) can benefit turkeys while improving the forest health. TSI involves thinning the forest by removing less desirable tree species and poorly-formed trees, leaving the remaining trees with more water, sunlight, and soil nutrients, which fosters quicker growth.

In forests where trees are large enough to conduct a commercial timber harvest, several methods of harvesting — including shelterwood harvesting and group selection harvesting — promote regeneration of oak species. For the first several years following a harvest, an abundance of nesting cover and food items are available for turkeys. Equally as important, these harvest methods promote the regeneration of oaks, which need a lot of sunlight. Following a harvest, it is important to conduct TSI when the young forest is about 20 to 35 years old because this facilitates full crown development of the remaining trees and also stimulates vegetative growth in the understory.

Managing Openings for Turkeys

Turkeys tend to do best on a landscape that contains a mixture of forested and open land cover types. When managing for turkeys, at least 10 percent of an overall acreage should be maintained in some type of open land, and a property made up of at least 30 percent of well-distributed openings is ideal. Openings can take many forms, including pastures, hayfields, cropland, orchards, roadsides, rights-of-way, old fields, and food plots. Depending on plant height, density, and species composition, openings can provide turkeys with places to feed, strut, nest, and rear their broods.

Management practices used to create or maintain openings include using herbicides, prescribed fire, disking, timber harvesting, and establishing food plots. Although common throughout much of Missouri, cool season pastures that contain exotic grasses such as tall fescue provide poor turkey habitat. To benefit turkeys, it is important to replace these exotic grasses with native grasses and forbs. To initiate the process, burn or hay the openings during August or early September to remove most of the vegetation and to stimulate new growth. When regrowth is about 6 inches tall, spray it with two quarts per acre of glyphosate. Unless the field had been previously row-cropped, the seedbank most often contains enough native seeds to make replanting unnecessary.

Give the seedbank a few years to respond on its own before considering planting.

Once native vegetation is established, these areas can be maintained with prescribed fire or disking. To maintain the vegetation in its current state after establishment, burn the fields on a two- to four-year rotation during the dormant season. To increase forb abundance, disk from late October to early March every three years. Although not as beneficial as prescribed burning and disking, these areas can be mowed in late winter. Consider managing only a portion of the opening each year to increase habitat diversity.

If converting cool season exotic grasses to natives is not possible due to management constraints, these areas can be enhanced for turkeys by over-seeding with ladino clover, red clover, alfalfa, or annual lespedeza. Although not as beneficial as converting the field to native vegetation, over-seeding in a cool-season field will enhance plant diversity and add value to the area for turkeys and other wildlife.

Food Plots

Although not a substitute for managing native habitat, food plots can be beneficial to turkeys. In addition to providing a supplemental food source, food plots can also provide quality brood-rearing habitat when left idle and are also effective places to harvest turkeys.

Clover is a great choice for landowners wanting to plant a food plot for turkeys. Clover plots are used heavily by turkeys throughout the spring and fall. Turkey broods use these areas during summer due to the abundance of

insects these plants attract. There are several varieties of clover that can be planted for turkeys. Ladino clover is a popular perennial plant that will persist for several years if maintained properly. Red clover is a hearty plant that is widely adapted to different soil conditions. This plant is a biennial, but can persist for three or more years with proper maintenance. Like red clover, crimson clover is adapted to a wide range of soil types, however this clover is an annual. Turkeys are attracted to each of these clovers, so the decision about which to plant comes down to site conditions and management options that are available.

Winter wheat is another good food plot choice for turkeys. Wheat provides a green food source during fall through early spring. After the wheat goes to seed, turkeys will feed on the seed heads through summer. If left fallow, a variety of forbs will germinate in the wheat plot, which will become great habitat for turkey broods. When establishing perennial clover plots, planting winter wheat at the same time makes a great combination. The wheat will act as a nurse crop for the clover as it becomes established. After the wheat goes to seed the following summer, it will disappear from the plot, leaving a lush field of clover.

Grain crops such as corn, soybeans, and grain sorghum (milo) can provide an excellent fall and winter food source for turkeys, especially during years of poor acorn production. Because deer, squirrels, raccoons, and other wildlife will also use these plots, plantings should be no smaller than one acre, and preferably larger (at least 3–5 acres). If left fallow, these areas can also serve as brood-rearing areas the following year.





Finding a Place to Hunt

Turkeys can be found throughout Missouri from the highly agricultural landscape of the northern counties to the vast forests of the Ozarks. Therefore, where you choose to hunt will likely depend on where you live, how far you wish to travel, and whether there are land-access restrictions.

Public Land

Public land in Missouri is owned and managed by a variety of organizations. However, most of the land open to hunting is managed by MDC or the U.S. Forest Service. Public areas have many benefits. Foremost, anyone with the appropriate hunting permits may hunt on public areas. Professional wildlife managers, who continually research and implement the latest techniques to enhance habitat and wildlife populations, oversee these areas. Public hunting areas, which are spread throughout the state, provide relatively easy access to hunting opportunities. Locate a conservation area near you by visiting mdc.mo.gov/atlas.

Become familiar with the area you plan to hunt by scouting in the off-season. One of the most enjoyable methods of scouting is participating in another activity while you scout. Search for shed antlers in late winter, hunt squirrels in summer or deer in the fall. Learning the hills and valleys, roads and trails, and habitat features of a public area pays off when formulating a hunting plan

and determining hunting sites. See the “Scouting” section for additional information about how to scout for turkeys.

Because public land is open to everyone, please use common sense and treat others with respect so everyone can have an enjoyable experience.

Managed Hunts

Missouri offers numerous managed turkey hunts during the spring turkey season. Hunters are drawn from an application pool using an online, random drawing system. Several managed hunts are available for youth hunters and hunters with disabilities. Managed hunt locations, dates, and details about the application process can be found in the *Spring Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information* booklet.

Private Land

With more than 93 percent of land in Missouri being privately owned, the bulk of turkey hunting opportunity is on private land. Private land is used for a variety of purposes including row crop, pasture, timber production, urban development, and wildlife habitat management. Although wildlife habitat is not the primary focus of most private land management, turkeys have adapted well to society’s modifications to their environment and, in many cases, have benefited.

Hunting private land offers many benefits. Limiting who may hunt on a specific property is one of the biggest. Fewer

hunters reduce disturbance, and hunters can spread out on the property so they do not interfere with each other. Blinds are more secure on private property, and landowners have much greater control over how many turkeys are harvested on their property.

Many hunters do not have a friend or family member who has land where they can hunt. This does not mean there is no private land available to hunt, only that it is more challenging to acquire permission. Challenging, fortunately, does not mean impossible. Here are a few things to consider when attempting to acquire permission to hunt on private land.

Visit Face-to-Face

Always take the time to stop by and visit with the landowner instead of only making a phone call. The face-to-face contact is important for landowners to learn more about you and to put a face and vehicle with the person that will be hunting their property.

Because land changes hands on a fairly frequent basis, locating the owner of a particular parcel can be challenging. Information on land ownership can be acquired at the county court house from the assessor's office or a plat book. Plat books can provide the name of the landowner and a phone book or the assessor's office can provide the landowner's address.

Look and Act Presentable

Think about your initial contact with a landowner. It is important to portray professionalism and trust. The landowner may have concerns about livestock or other assets on the property. In that first face-to-face meeting, the landowner has to determine if you will respect his or her property. This determination will be based in part on how you look, act, drive, and present yourself. Make a good first impression.

Be Courteous

Arrange to visit during the time of day when the landowner may be outdoors or easily accessible. Avoid meal times, when other guests are present, and any time after sunset. Enter with a positive demeanor and allow enough time to chat. Often landowners are proud of their property and the work they have put into it. A conversation can help you learn a lot about the surrounding area and its potential to support good turkey numbers. In addition, be courteous even if you have been told "no." Landowners in farming communities often know each other well, and word can spread quickly about a rude encounter.

Make it a Win-Win

A landowner who has allowed you to hunt on his or her property has given you something. It is a good idea to offer something in return. Depending on the situation, stopping by for an occasional chat, providing a portion of your harvest, or

pitching in to help around the property often will suffice. You also may ask if you can post the landowner's boundaries as a gesture of good faith. These activities help to develop a good, long-standing, hunter-landowner relationship.

Don't Give Up

Finding a landowner who doesn't already have a hunter or several hunters hunting on his or her property can be challenging. Getting told "no" is a part of asking permission and should be expected. With persistence and a positive attitude an opportunity will present itself.

If you find a landowner who allows you to hunt on his or her property, make sure to renew that agreement each year to ensure you are still allowed to hunt. Just because you secured access to hunt one year does not automatically give you permission to hunt the next year.

In addition to landowners providing free access to their land, there are other avenues to ensure you have a hunting location each spring. Two of these are leasing land and hiring an outfitter. Although both generally require payment, they are becoming increasingly popular. Leased land has the advantage of securing a particular property for the long-term and allows the lessees more say in how many people are able to hunt. Outfitters often provide a package arrangement that includes access to land as well as lodging and a hunting guide. This may be a good option for someone who wants a quality hunt with a high success rate but does not have the time to do the work in the field. Find outfitters and land to lease on the internet, in newspaper classifieds, through word of mouth, or from realtors.



Scouting

Once you have located property to hunt, your next job is to find turkeys. Obtain an aerial photo of the property you will be hunting and study the habitat features. Grab your boots and take a walk on the area as well. The more familiar you are with the area, the greater your chances of success during the hunting season.

Look

Become familiar with boundary lines and where turkey hangouts may be located. While doing your pre-season homework, locate any creeks, fences, or other obstacles that may hinder a gobbler from coming to your setup and make a mental note of where these are located. During on-the-ground scouting trips, watch for turkey sign, including droppings (j-shaped for gobblers and popcorn-shaped for hens), scratching, dusting areas, strutting areas, turkey feathers, and roosting areas.

Listen

As spring progresses and flocks begin to break up, toms will routinely gobble at dawn and sometimes at dusk. Start listening for gobblers around the middle of March and, if possible, listen once a week on the property you intend to hunt. Pick an unobtrusive area on the property for listening and arrive at least 30 minutes before sunrise. Listen on clear, calm mornings, if possible. Keep a log of the number of birds you hear and where they are located. Use a locator call (owl, crow, or hawk) to elicit gobbles if needed; however, avoid using turkey calls before season opens.

Locate

Note not only where turkeys are roosting, but also where they land after flying down. Try to observe where the birds frequent throughout the morning. By doing so, you will have a plan in place for midmorning hunts if your first setup of the day doesn't pan out. Mapping out the habits of as many birds as possible will give you options, thus increasing your chance for success. If the area you hunt has some open fields, spend some time glassing these areas with your binoculars to determine which portions of the fields are used the most and where turkeys typically enter and exit the fields.

Gathering Gear

Opening morning is an inconvenient time to find you have forgotten to pack your camouflage gloves and face mask. To prepare for the season, scratch out some time to get your gear in order. While you don't need everything in the latest turkey hunting catalog to harvest a bird, some equipment is necessary. Doing a mental walk-through of a typical hunt helps remind most hunters of the items to pack. While gathering your gear, make sure everything is working properly



Bowhunter Survey

A vital part of population monitoring is good record keeping. If you are an archery hunter, a great way to keep observation records and help MDC biologists collect data is to participate in the Bowhunter Observation Survey. Information you collect will be used by biologists to gauge the health of wildlife populations and set hunting regulations.

To participate, send your name and complete mailing address to: **Bowhunter Observation Survey; Missouri Department of Conservation; 3500 E. Gans Road; Columbia, MO 65201**. You will receive a diary to record the deer, turkey, and furbearers you observe while bowhunting. At the end of the season, drop the postage-paid diary in the mail. After MDC biologists tally the information, they will send you a summary of sightings for the entire state and return your diary if requested. Keep a file of your diaries, and you can go back through to see how things have changed on your hunting land over time.

and you know where to locate items when you need them. From a safety standpoint, make certain you avoid wearing any red, white, black, or blue colors while hunting, as these colors may be confused by another hunter as a turkey. As your turkey hunting experience and time afield increases, your gear and equipment will no doubt increase as well.

Turkey Communication

Turkeys have a well-developed communication system that plays an important role in their lives. From avoiding danger to mating, turkeys depend on communication to survive.

Turkeys use two main forms of communication: vocal and visual, and will often use both methods simultaneously. For example, a tom may gobble while strutting and posturing (the act of spreading its tail fan, dragging its wings, and making its body appear larger) for attraction and dominance. During this display, the gobbler is making his presence known vocally by gobbling and visually by displaying.

Vocal Communication

The turkey's vocabulary consists of at least 28 different calls, although most are heard infrequently by hunters. Each call has a general meaning, but turkeys vary their delivery depending on the message they are trying to convey. The volume and rhythm of vocalizations, as well as the behavior of turkeys while making the calls, can cause nearby turkeys to react in different ways. There are many reasons why turkeys vocalize, including locating other turkeys, keeping members of the flock together, and ensuring adequate spacing between members of the flock. Turkeys also use calls to reassemble the flock after being scattered and to alert other turkeys of a potential threat. Below, are some of the more commonly heard turkey vocalizations and how they may be used during a hunting situation. The National Wild Turkey Federation maintains recordings and more information about turkey vocalizations online at www.nwtf.org/hunt/wild-turkey-basics/turkey-sounds.

Gobble

The Call: The gobble is undoubtedly the most recognized of all turkey calls. Although it can be heard sporadically throughout the year, most gobbling occurs during the spring breeding season. Gobbling is used by males to attract hens, although it may also be taken as a warning by subdominant males. Gobbling most commonly occurs when males are roosted, although males will continue to gobble after flying down, especially when not in the presence of hens. Although jakes can gobble, they generally do so less frequently than toms. Gobbles of jakes typically consist of fewer notes and do not have the tonal quality of a tom's gobble.



Use for Hunting: Using a gobble call while turkey hunting is not recommended due to safety concerns. Being fully-camouflaged in the woods and shaking a gobble call can put a hunter in a very dangerous situation in which they may be mistaken for a turkey. In addition to the safety concerns associated with using this call, it is generally not very effective when compared with calls that imitate hen vocalizations.

Yelp

The Call: Yelps are also one of the most well-known turkey calls. Yelps are a highly variable call used to identify a turkey's location, elicit calls from other turkeys, and to attract other turkeys. The most commonly heard yelps include plain yelps, tree yelps, and assembly yelps. Plain yelps are a general call used throughout the year by males and females to locate other turkeys. Yelps are often mixed with clucks and purrs. Tree yelps are used during the early morning hours when turkeys are roosted. Tree yelps consist of a shorter series than plain yelps and are generally lower in volume. This vocalization helps to reassure members of the flock that other turkeys are nearby prior to fly-down time. Assembly yelps can be heard during the fall when hens reassemble their young after they have been separated from the flock. This call consists of a long series of yelps that is often preceded by several sharp clucks.

Use for Hunting: Hunters most often imitate yelps because of their effectiveness. A series of early morning soft tree yelps can lead a roosted gobbler to believe a hen is roosted nearby.

Plain yelps can be used during both spring and fall hunting seasons. Use them more than any other call when trying to lure in a gobbling bird or when walking through the woods trying to elicit a gobble from a nearby tom. Use plain yelps when walking through the woods during the fall season to elicit a response from nearby birds. Excited yelps can lure in a gobbler during spring, especially when mixed with cutting. If a gobbler you're calling to is close, but refuses to show himself, mix some soft yelps with clucks and purrs to coax him in. Scratch in the leaves occasionally to add realism.

Cutt

The Call: Cutting can be thought of as loud clucking, although this call can also resemble the cackle. The call is often done in a rapid series that may consist of only a few notes or may continue for up to 20 seconds. Unlike yelps in a series, which typically occur at relatively regular intervals, the cutts in a series usually occur at irregular intervals. Turkeys use this call when searching for other turkeys.

Use for Hunting: Cutting is a great call to use when a hunter is trying to get a gobbler excited. When mixed with excited yelps, cutting probably conveys to the gobbler that the hen is interested in his company and ready to be bred. Often gobblers can't resist the sound of excited yelps and cutts and come in to locate their source.

Cluck

The Call: Another commonly heard turkey call is the cluck. This single note call is made throughout the year by male and female turkeys, and is used to attract the attention of other turkeys. Clucks are soft calls, which are short in duration and only heard when turkeys are fairly close. Clucks can often be heard along with purrs, and the occasional soft yelp, as turkeys feed.

Use for Hunting: Clucks can be mixed with yelps whenever they are used. When tree yelping to a gobbler on the roost, add a cluck or two on the beginning and end of the yelps. Adding a few clucks to your plain yelping sequences adds realism. One of the best ways to use clucks is to mix them with soft yelps and purrs during spring. When calling to turkeys that have been hunted that spring, these soft calls can often make the difference between being successful and going home empty-handed.

Putt

The Call: The putt sounds similar to the cluck, but has a very different meaning. Unlike the cluck, which is typically made while turkeys are contented, the putt is a sharper, louder version of the cluck that turkeys use to let other turkeys know when they have spotted danger.

Use for Hunting: Because this vocalization signals danger to other turkeys, it has limited utility for hunters.

Purr

The Call: The purr is a soft, low volume call that turkeys emit most often while they are content. The call can often be heard when turkeys are feeding in a flock because it is used to help the birds maintain proper spacing. Although the purr is generally a relatively quiet call, turkeys also emit what is called a fighting purr, which can be heard from greater distances and is emitted when two or more turkeys are fighting for dominance.

Use for Hunting: Because they are low volume calls, purrs should most often be used when turkeys are close. Mix purrs with soft yelps and clucks to coax in a gobbler that is standing his ground and refuses to come within sight. Fighting purrs can be used occasionally to imitate gobblers that may be fighting over a hen. However, fighting purrs should generally be used as a last resort when other techniques have failed.



Turkey Talk Dictionary

Wild turkeys produce a number of vocalizations and sounds. Become familiar with the most basic (for recordings and more information on turkey vocalizations visit www.nwtf.org/hunt/wild-turkey-basics/turkey-sounds).

VOCALIZATION/SOUND	DESCRIPTION	APPLICATION
Cackle	Turkeys sometimes make this call when flying, often when flying down from the roost.	Use this call to let a gobbler know you are on the ground.
Cluck	This call consists of soft, contented staccato notes.	Use as a reassurance call to mean "I'm here, where are you?"
Cutt	This call, with sharp, staccato notes of varying pitch and intensity, conveys excitement and sometimes aggression.	Mix this call with yelps to convey excitement.
Fighting Purr	Turkeys produce this loud rolling call when fighting.	Use this call sparingly to fake a fight.
Gobble	Toms make this loud rolling call to attract hens in the spring.	This call is not recommended due to safety concerns.
Kee-Kee-Run	Young turkeys make this call, usually three high-pitched notes followed by yelps, when lost.	Use in the fall after a flock has been separated.
Purr	This soft, rolling call is often accompanied by clucks.	Use this to signify contentment and to convince a turkey to come those last few yards.
Putt	All turkeys make this call, typically when danger has been spotted.	This call has limited utility for hunting.
Spit and Drum	This sound is accompanied by strutting. It can only be heard when a gobbler is close.	This call has limited utility for hunting.
Tree Call	This call consists of soft nasal yelps made on the roost.	Use when calling to a gobbler before fly-down.
Yelp	Many versions exist (plain, excited, assembly). This is a common call of hens.	Use variations of the yelp for general communication with turkeys.

Cackle

The Call: The cackle is a complex call that turkeys make when in flight. It is most often heard as turkeys fly from their tree roosts in the morning (commonly referred to as the fly-down cackle). It can be noisy when turkeys take flight, so this 10- to 15-note call is probably used to prepare nearby turkeys for the commotion that is about to occur so the flock doesn't get startled. Turkeys will also cackle when flying up to roost in the evening or when flying over objects such as fences or rivers.

Use for Hunting: In addition to using tree yelps and clucks when calling to a roosted gobbler, a fly down cackle can be used to sound like a hen that has left the limb and is now on the ground. Flapping a turkey wing while cackling can add realism to your setup, but this is not recommended on public land due to safety concerns.

Kee-Kee-Run

The Call: During fall, when a turkey brood flock becomes separated, you will often hear a vocalization called the kee-kee-run. This call is made by young turkeys to let the hen know of their location and to allow the young birds to locate each other so they can reassemble. This unique-sounding call typically consists of three high-pitched whistles followed by a course yelp. After a flock has been scattered, you will hear this call coming from many directions as lost turkeys attempt to locate each other.

Use for Hunting: When a brood flock has been scattered during the fall turkey hunting season, there is no better call to imitate than the kee-kee-run. This pleading call will often draw the attention of nearby members of the flock that will often come to your setup running.

Visual Communication

Although we think of turkeys gobbling and yelping to communicate, they don't always make sounds to send a message. Turkeys frequently use body language and behavior — strutting is an example. In addition to strutting, turkeys also exhibit other posturing to help maintain social structure within a flock. This posturing can lead to fighting to establish dominance.

As a turkey approaches your setup, pay attention to its body language. A relaxed tom will exhibit normal walking behavior, may strut, and will usually have a relaxed or drooping snood. Stiff walking, high-stretched neck and head, putting, and a shortened snood are signs of an alert turkey that may be aware of your location.

Turkey Body Language

Wild turkeys have a variety of behaviors and features to signal their sex, age, mood, or intention. Get to know their most common behaviors and physical features.

Body Blow-up. Gobblers spread their tail fan, erect their body feathers, and drag their wings while showing off their iridescent colors to attract a mate.

Snood Senses. Watch a tom's snood as he approaches your setup. If the snood is long and droopy, he is likely content. If the snood stands straight up quickly, the bird is likely nervous and may not be hanging around long.

Rainbow Head and Neck. Turkeys' heads and necks change color frequently. In the spring, a gobbler's head color can change between red, white, and blue, often within a few seconds, depending on his mood.

Bristly Beard. Most toms have beards made up of hair-like bristles protruding from the center of the chest. Beards indicate the male sex and relative age (juvenile vs. adult). However, about 5 percent of hens have beards. Beards serve little purpose for determining age past two years. This is because they are rubbed or broken off as the birds walk or by ice buildup during winter.

Sharp Spurs. Gobblers have spurs, which are curved features with a bony core growing from the inner leg. Gobblers use spurs to fight and establish dominance. Spur length is the most accurate indicator for the aging of toms.





Choosing the Right Turkey Call

The communication between a hunter and a love-sick spring gobbler is why many people turkey hunt. To increase your odds of calling in a bird, spend time before season imitating turkey calls. If you are new to turkey calling, attend a turkey-calling seminar, or go online for recordings of turkey vocalizations. Start simple by using a box call or push-button call. If your calling skills don't match those of a competitive turkey caller, don't fret. Real turkeys have varied tones and, just like humans, each has a unique voice. More importantly, learn the rhythm of specific calls, what each call means, and how to apply them in different hunting situations. Become proficient with a variety of calls including friction, air blown, and locator. Keep your calls working well by completing necessary maintenance. At minimum, learn to reproduce the yelp and cluck of a hen.

As with other wildlife calling, two main forms of turkey calling are practiced: contact calling and blind calling. In contact calling, you have seen or heard the turkey and can watch or hear the bird's reaction when you call. This can be the most effective form of calling. During blind calling situations, you use calls in a likely spot, approximately every 30 minutes, with the hope of calling in a turkey that is within hearing distance.



Friction Calls

These calling devices produce turkey sounds by rubbing together pieces of wood, slate, ceramic, or glass. Typical friction calls include pot/pan calls, box calls, and push/pull calls. Although these calls are relatively simple to use and recommended for beginners, many veteran turkey hunters wouldn't head to the woods without having at least one of these calls. Try different types of friction devices as your skills improve. Although their relative ease of use makes these calls appealing, they do have drawbacks. Most require two hands to operate (one hand for push/pull calls), which means more movement. With a gobbler closing in, a hunter must decide

whether to have the call or the shotgun in hand. Switching between the two when a tom is close can be very difficult without spooking the bird. Also, most friction calls will not work when wet, making them challenging to use on rainy days.

PUSH/PULL CALLS: These calls, commonly referred to as “push button calls,” are perhaps the easiest turkey call to use for a beginner. As such, they are a great call to get kids interested in turkey calling. Some push button calls are made of wood — others of plastic. These calls produce yelps, clucks, and purrs with relative ease. Most push button calls are low volume calls. They work effectively when turkeys are reasonably close, but the sound does not carry very far, particularly on windy days.

BOX CALLS: Slightly more challenging to use than push/pull calls, box calls can still be mastered with relative ease and are a great choice for those just getting started with turkey calling. Box calls produce great yelps and cuts, but it is challenging to imitate other vocalizations. Most box calls are made of wood — usually cedar, cherry, or walnut. Box calls can produce high volume notes and are great for striking gobbles at long distances, especially on windy days.

POT/PAN CALLS: These calls, often referred to as “slate calls,” are slightly more challenging to learn than box calls, but can produce a wider range of turkey vocalizations. These are two-piece calls, including a pot and a striker, which is dragged across the surface of the pot. Most pots and strikers are made of wood. A wide range of woods are used. Common surface materials on pots include slate, glass, aluminum, and ceramic. Yelps, clucks, purrs, cuts, and cackles can be made on pot/pan calls with some practice. Callers can easily change the volume of their calls by increasing or decreasing pressure of the call’s striker.

Air-Blown Calls

By far the most common air-blown call is the mouth call, although tube and wingbone calls would also be included in this category. Mouth calls consist of one or more (usually two or three) latex reeds that are set within a metal or plastic frame covered with a flexible tape. Mouth calls can produce a wide range of realistic sounds, but require more practice than friction calls. Typically, calls with the fewest number of reeds are the easiest for beginners to use. The latex reeds of mouth calls come in a range of cuts and hunters should experiment with different versions to find the one that suits them best. In addition to being versatile, mouth calls allow a hunter to call while having their hands on their shotgun or bow. This greatly reduces movement and the chances that an incoming gobbler will spot the hunter. Given how they’re used, mouth calls can be used rain or shine. Although they require practice to be proficient, mastering the mouth call is well worth your time.



Air-blown calls

Locator Calls

During the breeding season, with testosterone levels high, toms will shock gobble at almost any loud noise, including train whistles, crows, owls, thunder, and even gun shots in the distance. Calls designed to get a tom to shock gobble fall into the locator call category and allow hunters to pinpoint a gobbler’s location before setting up and attempting to call the bird in using a turkey call. Commonly used locator calls include those that imitate barred owls, crows, and hawks. Although they can elicit gobbles throughout the day, owl calls are ideal for getting a gobbler to give away his location while roosted in the morning. After the sun rises, a crow call can be a great tool to make a tom gobble. In addition to helping you locate a gobbler while roosted, locator calls are very useful when changing locations as you attempt to call in a gobbler. If a gobbler won’t come to your turkey calls and you need to reposition, use the locator call to keep track of the gobbler’s location as you move to make sure you don’t get too close and spook him.

Choosing the Right Shotgun or Bow

Shotguns

Modern shotguns are the most popular choice for hunting turkeys. Twelve gauge is the most popular choice, but a 20 gauge makes a great choice for youth or any hunter with a smaller frame. Finding a shotgun that fits your frame

maximizes ease of use. As a rule of thumb, when mounted on your shoulder, there should be at least one-half inch of space between your nose and hand. Shotguns used for upland bird hunting can be used for turkey hunting, but avoid guns that have a shiny barrel and make sure to have a full or extra full choke. Consider adding a sling to make long walks more comfortable. Some hunters choose to put scopes or red-dot sights on their turkey guns, but most hunters use the shotgun's bead(s) when aiming.

Ammunition

Although standard shotgun loads can be used for turkey hunting, most loads designed specifically for hunting turkeys offer the advantage of having higher powder and load charges. This can increase the effective range of your gun, which will help you to harvest more turkeys in the long run. The most common shot sizes for turkey hunting are sizes No. 4, No. 5, and No. 6. Shot larger in diameter than No. 4 (No. 2, BBs, etc.) is not permitted to hunt turkeys in Missouri. Regardless of which shot size you choose, always pattern your shotgun to ensure the ammunition patterns well in your gun.

Bows

Bowhunting turkeys can be challenging, yet extremely rewarding. The same bow used for deer hunting works fine for turkeys as well. Choices are endless, including traditional equipment like long bows or recurves, modern compound bows, or crossbows. Practice with your bow and only take shots at turkeys that are within your effective range. The same broadheads that hunters use when deer hunting can also be used for turkeys, but larger-cutting diameter broadheads are typically best for turkey hunting. In addition to using standard broadheads to shoot turkeys in the body, several manufacturers make broadheads designed to be shot at a turkey's head and neck. These large heads are designed to sever the turkey's head or break its neck on impact. Although some hunters choose to bowhunt turkeys without one, having a ground blind offers a considerable advantage because it conceals the hunter when the bow is drawn. Decoys are useful when bowhunting because they divert the bird's attention away from the hunter allowing the hunter to draw without being noticed. They also generally cause the birds to remain within shooting range for a longer period, which is a big advantage when waiting for the right shot to present itself.



Testing Your Equipment

If a safe, legal, and ethical shot opportunity at a turkey arises, you will need the right equipment to cleanly harvest the bird. If you plan to use a shotgun, a patterning session to test your gun, choke, and shell combination is a must. A trip to the range before season is all it takes to complete this task. During shotgun patterning sessions, you are not only checking for point of impact (the gun shoots where you aim) but also pattern testing to determine the number of pellets in your pattern. You will need adequate pellet density in your pattern (at least 230 inside a 30-inch circle) as well as the appropriate-sized pellet to effectively harvest a turkey. Range time is also needed if you will be hunting with archery equipment. Be certain of vital archery shots and routinely practice in realistic hunting situations. Whether you are using a shotgun or bow, the key is to only take shots that are within the effective range of your equipment and skill level. To ensure you are taking appropriate shots, learn how to subtend (see Page 25 for additional information). Properly testing equipment will maximize harvest opportunities and will reduce the likelihood of wounding a bird.



Shotgun Patterning

STAY SAFE: Keep safety in mind; make sure the muzzle of your shotgun is always pointed in a safe direction, and wear eye and ear protection.

LOCATE A RANGE: MDC manages nearly 40 shooting ranges throughout the state, including five staffed shooting range and outdoor education centers. Locations and additional information are available online at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZZF. After locating a range, ensure you have a safe backstop to shoot at and place a 4-foot-by-4-foot piece of paper on a target holder. Place a turkey head target (available on Page 45 or at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZqS) in the center of the paper for an aiming point.

CHOOSE YOUR DISTANCE: After placing your target, back up to your desired distance. The distance from which you should shoot at a turkey depends on your shooting skill and the limitations of your shotgun and ammunition. Twenty yards is a good starting point. Smaller shot sizes may have a large shot charge, but do not carry as much kinetic energy as larger pellets. Larger pellets carry more energy, but due to the size, have a smaller shot charge in the shell. Shots should be restricted to 40 yards or less.

TEST YOUR AMMUNITION: Remove three shotshells from your box of ammunition, load one, and set the other two aside. Aim at the wattles on the turkey head target and take one shot. Retrieve your target, put up a new piece of 4-foot-by-4-foot paper and a new turkey head target in the center. Repeat this process using the other two shotshells.

EVALUATE YOUR PATTERN: Determine the richest portion (greatest density of pellets) of the pattern on the paper and draw a 30-inch circle around the shot pattern (a pencil with a 15-inch piece of string works well). If the richest portion of the pattern is not located near the wattles of the turkey target, verify the aiming point of your shotgun by conducting point of impact testing using a shooting bench. Count the number of pellet holes inside the 30-inch circle on each piece of paper, add them together, and divide by three. To lethally harvest a turkey, you will need a minimum of 230 pellets inside a 30-inch circle. These 230 pellets must also contain enough energy at the distance you are shooting.

MAKE CHANGES: If needed, make changes to your choke, distance, or ammunition to ensure that the recommended minimums to cleanly harvest a turkey are met.

REPEAT THE PROCESS: Pattern your shotgun if you change chokes, distance from the target, or ammunition (shell length, shot charge, powder charge, etc.). Keep a detailed logbook of patterning sessions and results for future reference.

Practice Subtending

Subtending enables hunters to accurately judge how far away a turkey is by the size of its head or body relative to an object on their hunting equipment (shotgun bead, barrel, receiver, bow sight, etc.). This technique is very effective for turkey hunting, and it can ensure shots are taken within your effective range, thus reducing wounding loss of turkeys.

Subtending Steps

1. Compare your gun or bow to a life-size turkey (most decoys work well) at your effective range.
2. Draw a picture of the amount of the decoy that is covered up.
3. Draw a picture of the amount of the decoy that is covered up outside of your effective range.
4. Practice and get a mental picture of the difference.
5. When hunting, use the same comparison you used before season, positively identify a legal turkey that is within range of your equipment, and ensure the shot is safe.

Shot Placement

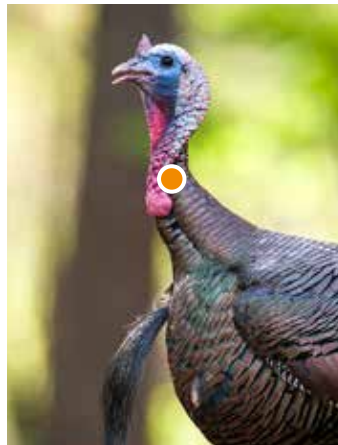
Turkeys are extremely tough birds, and success in the field depends on proper shot placement. As hunters, we have a responsibility to make a quick and clean harvest. If using a shotgun, the aim point on a turkey is on the neck at the junction of where the feathers meet the wattles. Do not cover the entire head of the turkey with your shotgun bead because this may cause you to shoot over the bird. By aiming at the middle of the neck, you should get a good distribution of pellets in the head and throughout the bird's neck. When patterning your shotgun, focus on the sight picture. Where you aim affects the distribution of shot pellets on the target. Before shooting at a turkey with a shotgun, make sure the head and neck are outstretched, increasing the size of the kill zone. It is not recommended to shoot at a turkey that is strutting.

When aiming at a turkey with your bow, do not simply aim at the center of the bird — learn a turkey's anatomy and aim



where it will result in a quick kill. The heart, lungs, and liver of a turkey represent a small target, so arrow placement needs to be precise. The next time you are cleaning a wild turkey, take time to note the location of the vitals. It is important to also consider how you'll hit the vitals at the various angles that a gobbler may present (broadside, facing towards, or facing away). Broadheads designed specifically to be shot at a turkey's head and neck make picking an aiming point easy.

SHOTGUN SHOT PLACEMENT



ARCHERY SHOT PLACEMENT



Other Hunting Equipment

Camouflage

Wearing camouflage is a necessity when turkey hunting because of the bird's exceptional eyesight. Although any pattern of camouflage can be effective, choosing a pattern that blends in well with the woods and fields where you hunt is always a good idea. In addition to having camouflaged pants and shirt, you'll need gloves, a hat, and a face mask. Thin gloves are ideal because they allow a hunter to easily feel their gun's safety and trigger. A face mask that hangs around the neck when not in use can be quickly slid over the hunter's face should a gobbler sound off close by. In addition to having a camouflage hat, it is a good idea to carry a blaze orange hat while turkey hunting, especially on public land. The orange hat can be worn when moving through the woods to alert other hunters of your presence. When beginning to call in a turkey, this hat can simply be switched with the camouflage hat.

Footwear

Depending on the area you hunt and the style of hunting you prefer, rubber boots and hiking boots are good choices for the turkey hunter. Rubber boots keep your feet dry in muddy or wet conditions, and are ideal when hunting requires relatively limited walking. For hunters that plan on hunting large expanses of timber, where they may end up walking several miles in a day, a comfortable pair of light-weight hiking shoes is a good choice. When wearing low-cut hiking boots while turkey hunting, wear drab-colored socks that will help you blend in when you sit down and begin calling to a gobbler.

Vests

Several manufacturers make vests specifically designed for turkey hunters. These vests contain lots of pockets to store your gear like calls, water bottles, gloves, decoys, and other items. Many vests also have a thick, padded seat that helps to keep you dry and comfortable while sitting in the field. A number of vests also have a game bag which allow you to safely and comfortably carry your gobbler out of the woods after a successful hunt. Although not a necessity for turkey hunters, many veteran turkey hunters will tell you that they consider a vest an important part of their turkey hunting gear.

Decoys

Given the social nature of turkeys, decoys can be very effective tools to draw birds into range. However, they are not fail proof, and in some circumstances, decoys may hinder birds coming into range. Here are some things to keep in mind when using decoys.

Decoys range in price, material, size, weight, and posture. Try to strike a balance between realism, price, and pack-ability. If you are planning to only use one decoy, a hen is



recommended. If you'd like to increase the versatility of your setup, considering purchasing a jake decoy as well.

Turkey decoys have become incredibly realistic. So much so, other hunters may think they are the real thing. When using decoys, always make sure they are transported in a drab or blaze orange bag and the entire decoy is covered from view. When positioning decoys, ensure you can see well beyond the decoys and make sure the decoys are positioned offset from where an approaching hunter may come. If using a jake or gobbler decoy, use extreme caution. It is not advisable to use male turkey decoys when hunting public land.



Decoy setups depend on the situation. In most cases, a single hen will do the trick. Combining a jake with a hen in the spring can be extremely effective as well, especially when gobblers are with hens. Often, hens may not necessarily come in to investigate a hen decoy. However, having a jake with your hen decoy may just make the gobbler leave his hens to challenge what he believes to be a young rival. Some hunters use full-strut gobbler decoys. These decoys can be very effective at bringing in dominant birds, but can cause subordinate birds to shy away.

Stake decoys approximately 20 yards from your setup if hunting with a shotgun. Not only is this within the effectively range of nearly all shotguns, but it can also help you judge the distance of an approaching turkey — if the bird is twice the distance as the decoy, you'll know it's about 40 yards away. If hunting with a bow, consider placing the decoy 10 yards away and use this same principle to help you determine when the bird is within 20 yards.

Ground Blinds

Although setting up next to trees or other natural cover can maximize mobility, ground blinds offer huge advantages for turkey hunting. Blinds are especially effective when hunting with young children that may not be able to sit still for long. Turkeys pay little to no attention to blinds, even blinds put up right before having contact with a turkey. In addition, ground blinds can be placed in the middle of an open field and turkeys won't be spooked by them most of the time. To minimize the potential of turkeys shying away from blinds, hunters should wear dark colored clothing, keep most of the windows closed, and keep movements slow and mainly below the window openings.



Essential Equipment

- Proper hunting permits
- Bow or shotgun
- Ammunition or arrows
- Full camouflage outerwear including hat, face mask, and gloves
- Orange hat or vest (wear when moving, especially on public land)
- Orange bag to transport turkey
- Small flashlight or headlamp
- Bottle of water
- Cellphone and/or portable radio
- Turkey call
- Small first-aid kit

Optional Equipment

- Turkey vest
- Seat cushion
- Decoys
- Waterproof boots
- Hunting blind
- Binoculars
- Snacks
- Range finder
- Saw/pruner
- GPS device
- Map and compass
- Rain gear
- Additional turkey calls
- Toilet paper
- Extra clothes in a waterproof bag, especially face mask and gloves
- Fire-starting supplies
- Knife
- Signal device such as loud whistle
- Rubber gloves for cleaning
- Firearms cleaning kit
- Multi-tool or small tool kit
- Insect repellent



DURING THE HUNT

Turkey Hunting Regulations

As with any type of hunting, you must understand the regulations associated with the species you intend to harvest. Before heading afield, make certain you can distinguish between a gobbler and a hen because only male turkeys or turkeys with a visible beard are legal to harvest during the spring season. In addition, be familiar with the tagging procedures after you harvest a bird. Pick up a current copy of the *Spring Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information* booklet or *Fall Deer and Turkey Regulations and Information* booklet at your local MDC office or other permit vendor. You can also access turkey season regulations online by visiting short.mdc.gov/ZZf. Contact your local conservation agent if you have any questions about hunting regulations.



Four Common Causes of Turkey Hunting Incidents

- **Hunter judgment mistakes**, such as mistaking another person for game or not checking the foreground or background before firing.
- **Violating safety rules**, such as pointing the muzzle in an unsafe direction or ignoring safety procedures when crossing a fence or other obstacle.
- **Lack of familiarity and practice**, which can lead to using improper ammunition, accidental discharges, and stray shots.
- **Mechanical failure**, such as an obstructed barrel.

Safety

To buy firearms hunting permits, most hunters must pass a hunter-education course (see the *Spring Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information* booklet or *Fall Deer and Turkey Regulations and Information* booklet for exceptions). The Missouri Bowhunter Education Course is not required to bowhunt in Missouri, but is beneficial if you choose to bowhunt turkeys.

The most important rule of firearms safety is to keep your muzzle pointed in a safe direction. You are responsible for each projectile you shoot from your firearm or bow until it finally comes to rest. Some pellet types used for turkey hunting (particularly high-density type loads) can travel long distances with high amounts of kinetic energy. Always be sure of your target and what is beyond it.

Safe gun handling is a must for you and your hunting companions. Treat every firearm as if it was loaded. Learn the techniques for carrying your firearm safely. Always maintain a safe zone of fire while hunting with others and communicate with other hunters as frequently as possible while you are hunting.

Don't endanger yourself or others by hunting under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If you must take prescription medicines, check with your physician to see if they are safe to use while hunting. If a medicine should not be taken while operating heavy machinery, you should not use it while hunting.



While turkey hunting, always avoid wearing clothing that is red, white, blue, or black — colors of a gobbler. In addition, consider wearing orange when moving through the woods and always make sure decoys and harvested turkeys are covered during transport.



Spring Turkey Hunting Strategy

With lengthening day light, spring marks the turkey breeding season — a time when Missouri's woods are filled with the sounds of gobbling toms. The spring turkey season in Missouri provides action-packed hunts for about 150,000 hunters each year. The primary hunting strategy during spring involves calling gobblers into range using hen calls, and sometimes using decoys. Success depends on many factors including turkey numbers on a hunting area, hunting pressure, setup location, a hunter's calling ability, patience, and outdoor skills. Many turkey hunters spend just as much time scouting in the spring as hunting and this often leads to a greater chance of success.

Spring turkey hunting is highly interactive. One of the most exciting experiences a hunter can have is the interaction with a gobbler being lured in. Although being proficient at mimicking the sounds of a hen will certainly increase your chances of success, knowing where to set up, how often to call, and which hen vocalizations to imitate can be even more important.

Roosting a Gobbler

If time allows, it can be helpful to roost a gobbler the evening before you plan to hunt. Find a location on the property that

allows a good vantage point while allowing you to remain undetected from the turkeys you'll be hunting the following morning. At sunset, listen for gobbling turkeys and pinpoint their location as best you can. Although roosting turkeys during the evening is not critical to having a successful turkey hunt, knowing the location of gobblers prior to your hunt provides you with a solid place to start your next morning's hunt.

Standard Daybreak Approach

Plan on being up early for your spring turkey hunt. You'll want to be in the woods before gobblers begin sounding off from the limb at daybreak. If you roosted a gobbler the night before, walk to within the general vicinity of where you believe he is roosted, but not close enough that you might flush him from the tree. Stop and then listen for him to gobble as the woods begin to become light. If you do not have a gobbler roosted, listen from a location on the property that would allow you to hear any turkeys that may be roosted there. When a turkey sounds off, quietly walk to within about 100 yards of the bird and select a large tree to sit against — one that offers you good visibility to spot the gobbler as he approaches your calls. Next, give four to five soft tree yelps — the gobbler will

probably gobble back from the limb. After he answers, wait for the gobbler to fly down before making any additional calls. If you are close enough to his roost tree, you may hear his wing beats as he sails to the ground. If not, listen for his gobbles to become quieter which would indicate that he is on the ground.

With the gobbler on the ground, give a series or two of plain yelps. If he answers, wait a minute or so and call again. If he gobbles and is noticeably closer, this may be all that it takes to lure him in. Follow the sounds of him gobbling as he approaches, and be ready for the shot when he steps within range. Listen for the sounds of spitting and drumming as he approaches because they will tip you off to his location. If the bird changes his course on the way in, be sure to track his progress with the bead of your shotgun or with your bow. This will help you to be positioned when he steps into view. It is important to be motionless when the gobbler is closing in. Continuously scan the woods with your eyes so you'll spot him as soon as he comes into view. Ideally, the bird will appear where you're aiming. If the turkey appears slightly to one side or the other, do not move. Instead watch the turkey as he walks. Look ahead of the bird and identify a tree or other large object that will obstruct the turkey's view. When the gobbler walks behind the object, in one motion, quickly swing your shotgun or bow so it is positioned on the opposite side of the object. When the gobbler steps out, take the first safe shot that presents itself.

Standard Mid-Morning Approach

If you do not hear a turkey gobble at daybreak, there are two basic approaches you can take. One is to walk through the woods quietly and call (yelping and cutting) about every 100–200 yards. When a gobbler responds, move to within about 100 yards of him and use the calling approach described in the Standard Daybreak Approach section. Another approach, especially when hunting smaller properties, is to set up in a location where you believe turkeys frequent (often determined from pre-season scouting). Often this area will be an agricultural field, food plot, or hardwood ridge. Sit down, get comfortable, and be patient. Call (yelps, clucks, and purrs) every 10–15 minutes to strike a gobbler from a nearby tom. Be still because a gobbler may approach silently without gobbling. If you're hunting in a large field, putting a decoy in front of you will help to lure in a tom should he appear in the field.

Spring Hunting Scenarios

Although most hunters would be thrilled to call a gobbler in each time they imitated a hen, this is not often the case. During some hunts, gobblers may approach a hunter's calls immediately. At other times, a tom may gobble very little in response to calling. On some days, a gobbler may gobble to a hunter's calls, but walk in the opposite direction. On other days, a tom may gobble very little at all because of wet or windy conditions or because he already has hens with him. These situations contribute to making turkey hunting so challenging, yet rewarding. As a hunter, to be consistently successful you must read the conditions, terrain, and the behavior of the gobblers you are hunting, and determine the best approach to effectively lure the bird to within range. Below, are some different scenarios hunters may encounter while spring turkey hunting and some techniques that might help you to be successful in these situations. Each scenario also includes insight into gobbler behavior.





Scenario 1: The Gobbler that Won't Budge

SITUATION: You've set up about 100 yards away from a roosted gobbler. After he flies down, you offer him your best hen imitations. He gobbles back just about every time you call to him, but after half an hour of this, it's clear he is not coming any closer. What strategies might you try to lure this bird in?

TECHNIQUE 1: Offer the gobbler some excited calls. If plain hen yelps and clucks have not budged the gobbler, increase the volume of your yelps and mix in some cutting. Often, a gobbler will answer right back and begin gobbling on his own before heading in your direction.

INSIGHT: Although turkey hunters try to lure in gobblers with hen calls, in nature it is typically the gobblers that lure in the hens. Therefore, it is natural for a tom to gobble, but not approach your setup. The tom is simply waiting for the hen to walk into view. Increasing the volume and excitement of your yelping and mixing in some cutting sends a message to a gobbler that a hen is ready to be bred. Some gobblers find this excited hen calling is too much to take and can't resist the urge to come closer.

TECHNIQUE 2: If your plan of excited yelps has failed to lure in the gobbler, go silent. Sit still and stop calling for 15-30 minutes. Be prepared for the tom to start gobbling on his own, and resist the urge to call back to him. Have your gun or bow ready and be watchful for his approach.

INSIGHT: When you stop calling to a gobbler, he probably believes the hen has left the area. Not wanting to miss out on an opportunity to breed, he will often come looking for the hen. If he was hesitant to come in to your calls, he may have been hunted before during the season. Be prepared for him to come in silent and approach your setup with caution.

TECHNIQUE 3: If sitting quietly for 30 minutes has not worked and the gobbler has still not approached your setup, consider backing off and moving to a different location. Swing to the side of the bird and set up again at least 90 degrees from your initial calling position. When moving through the woods, use a locator call, such as a crow or hawk call, to keep tabs on the bird as you ease to a different setup. Avoid using a hen call while moving because the gobbler may approach before you are set up and ready. When you are set up, offer a few soft clucks and yelps and be ready.

INSIGHT: Turkeys are mobile birds that don't often stand still for long. Moving to a different location adds realism to your approach, which may be all that it takes to convince the tom that you are the real thing. Moving to a different calling location may also remove a barrier that was located between you and the gobbler. Perhaps there was a downed tree, creek, or fence between you and the bird. By moving, you may have created an easier path for the gobbler to approach your setup.

Scenario 2: The Gobbler that is Going Away

SITUATION: As day breaks, you set up on a bird that is gobbling fairly well on the roost. After he hits the ground, you begin your calling sequence. Although he doesn't answer you every time you call, he is gobbling fairly well, but is not heading in your direction. In fact, each time he gobbles, it sounds like he is getting farther away. What might you do to bring this gobbler within range?

TECHNIQUE 1: If your plain yelps and clucks have failed to turn the gobbler, try mixing cutting with some excited yelps. If the gobbler cuts you off by gobbling during your series of calls, continue calling as you imitate a hen that is desperately trying to keep the gobbler from leaving the area.

INSIGHT: More than likely this tom has hens that are dragging him in a different direction. He is gobbling to let you know that he is interested, and he would like for you to come to him. Remember, in nature the gobbler is accustomed to the hens coming when he gobbles. Sometimes getting more excited with your calling can cause a gobbler like this to split from the flock and seek what he believes is a hen that is ready to be bred.

TECHNIQUE 2: If your approach of using excited calls falls short, try to determine which direction the gobbler is moving and circle around in front of him. Use a locator call (crow, owl, or hawk) to check his location as you move through the woods. If he answers back, it should be relatively easy to get into position. If the tom does not answer your calls, be careful not to get too close and spook him. If he is with hens, they will likely be feeding. Listen for scratching in the leaves or soft hen calling to help you locate the flock. When you believe you are ahead of the gobbler, get set up and give some soft yelps, mixed with clucks and purrs. Because he is likely with hens, don't necessarily expect him to answer you. Be ready for the gobbler to suddenly appear and be mindful of any nearby hens that might be standing near the gobbler when he steps into view.

INSIGHT: Most of the time, a gobbler with hens is going to stay with them. If you can't get the birds to come to your location, often your only hope is to try to get between them and wherever they're headed. Even if your setup isn't exactly in line with their direction of travel, you can often coax the flock in your direction with some soft calling.

Scenario 3: The Gobbler with Vocal Hens

SITUATION: During a late morning hunt, your calls are answered by a couple toms. After you get set up on the birds, you do some soft calling and the toms answer right back. However, you also hear hens calling near the toms and fear they will drag the gobblers away. Your calls have the toms gobbling; however, they have stood their ground and don't seem to be getting any closer. What technique might you use in this situation?

TECHNIQUE: Challenge the talkative hens by mimicking their calls and topping it with more aggressive cutting and yelping. Use different calling devices to convince the flock you are more than one bird. Add realism by mixing in clucks and purrs with leaf scratching. Often, by calling back to vocal hens, you can lure them right into your setup. In this case, the gobblers will more than likely be right behind the hens as they approach.

INSIGHT: Turkeys are social birds, especially hens. If hens hear you calling, there is a good chance you'll peak their curiosity, and they will come in to investigate. It might be a dominant hen that comes in to challenge what she believes to be a rival. In other instances, it may simply be a hen that is curious and seeking companionship. Either way, luring the hens into your setup is the key to having a chance of harvesting one of these toms.



Scenario 4: The Silent Gobbler

SITUATION: It's mid-morning and after walking and calling since daybreak, a gobbler finally answers your calls. You slip in to about 100 yards from his position and sit down. You call, but he doesn't answer. After waiting a couple minutes, you call again, but again, there is no answer. You sit for a few more minutes and then the tom surprises you by gobbling on his own. Excited by hearing the gobble, you call, but once again, he does not answer you. What should you try next?

TECHNIQUE 1: Sit still and be very cautious. Because this bird is not gobbling much, it is difficult to tell if he is staying put, moving closer, or going away. He could appear at any point, so don't let your guard down. Listen for spitting and drumming, which would signal his approach. Call sparingly every 10 minutes or so. As he gobbles occasionally, continue to position yourself so you are always facing in his direction and ready should he decide to break and head in your direction. If he gobbles and is a bit farther away, move cautiously toward him and get set up again.

INSIGHT: Toms that gobble infrequently are some of the most difficult to hunt. Because you rarely know their location, it is difficult to move to a different calling location without running the risk of spooking the bird. The gobbler in this scenario probably has hens with him. In the presence of hens, toms strut frequently and gobble much less often. By being patient and remaining within a reasonable distance of the gobbler, you might eventually coax him (or the hens) in your direction.

TECHNIQUE 2: If you're hunting a small property and you believe this may be the only bird you have to hunt that day, you may be forced to stick with it and hope the bird comes to your location eventually. Or if it is late in the day and you only have a bit more time to hunt before heading home, this bird may be your only option. However, if you have the time, and some other areas to hunt, often your best bet with a gobbler like the one described here is to leave the area and attempt to locate another bird.

INSIGHT: Rather than spending the morning hunting a gobbler that refuses to answer your calls, your time might be better spent trying to strike up another tom that will be more willing to come to your location. You can always swing back through the area later in the day or on another day in hopes of catching the gobbler by himself or in a more talkative mood.

Scenario 5: The Field Gobbler

SITUATION: During pre-season scouting, you've learned that a gobbler and several hens are routinely located in the corner of a crop field during mid-morning. You're not sure where the birds roost — only where they spend the mid-morning hours. How might you be successful in this situation?

TECHNIQUE: Because you have these birds patterned, the logical place to set up is along the edge of the woods near where you've spotted them previously in the field. If you can get set up before dawn, this is your best option. If not, give yourself plenty of time to get set up well before you expect the turkeys to appear in the field. Tuck yourself back in the woods a bit to be concealed, but make sure you have a clear shot out into the field. Because you may be sitting in the same location for some time, make sure you're comfortable. Consider setting up a ground blind if you don't think you can sit still. A decoy will be very helpful in this situation. Consider using both a hen and a jake decoy. In this particular scenario where you have the birds patterned, calling isn't absolutely necessary, but the occasional series of yelps may actually bring in a different gobbler. Because the gobbler you've seen has hens, don't expect him to gobble on the way in. Be observant and patient as you wait for the birds to appear. If the turkeys enter the field close to your setup, you may not have to call to them at all — the sight of your decoys will likely be enough to lure them in. If they appear farther down the field, give them a series of yelps to let them know you're there.

INSIGHT: Use pre-season scouting to help you to be successful. If you have birds patterned, your chances of success increase considerably. As mentioned, gobblers with hens can be very difficult to hunt. However, if you know where they spend their time, waiting them out in these locations can be extremely effective. Decoys are an asset when hunting along field edges. In this situation, having a jake decoy with the hen can often make the difference between simply watching the birds feed in the field from a distance to being able to tote the gobbler out of the woods in your vest. If the site of your hen decoy isn't enough to lure in the hens that are with the gobbler, the sight of the jake decoy will often cause the gobbler to leave the hens and run to your setup. When selecting a location to set up along a field edge, resist the temptation to set up right along the edge. Instead sit back in the shade against a large tree just inside the wood line. You won't be as exposed as the birds close the distance and it will allow you to get away with a bit more movement as you patiently wait for the birds to appear in the field.

Scenario 6: The Silent Morning

SITUATION: You arrive at your hunting location well before sunrise, but as day breaks, you do not hear any gobbling turkeys. You wait until you're convinced it's light enough for any turkeys in the area to have flown down, but still you hear no gobbling. What should your next step be?

TECHNIQUE 1: One approach when facing this situation is head off on foot in search of a gobbling turkey. Walk through areas you expect to hold turkeys and call every 100 yards or so until a gobbler answers you.

INSIGHT: This approach works well if you have a lot of property to cover and if weather conditions are conducive to good gobbling activity (dry and relatively calm conditions). If you hunt a smaller property and feel you would have heard a bird gobbling if one were located there, there is little point in employing this technique. Similarly, if it's raining or windy, turkeys are less likely to gobble. By walking through the woods, you're more likely to spook turkeys in the area than you are to harvest a gobbler. Alternatively, if the weather is reasonably good and you're hunting a large tract of ground, walking and calling can be a very effective technique.

TECHNIQUE 2: If you don't hear any gobbling at first light and the weather is poor or the property is small enough that you feel you would have heard any gobbling birds there, your best bet is to set up in a spot where you expect turkeys to be at some point later in the morning. These locations might be a food plot, pasture, crop field, or hardwood ridge with turkey sign. Find a comfortable spot that allows you to be concealed, set out a decoy or two, and wait. Give a series of yelps, clucks, and purrs every 10–15 minutes and be patient. Even if you're unable to call a gobbler into your setup, you might hear one sound off somewhere in the distance in which case you can collect your decoys and go after him.

INSIGHT: When it's raining or windy, resist the urge to take off on foot in search of a gobbler. Instead, rely on scouting trips prior to the season and return to known turkey hangouts. Weather can affect the mood of turkeys, which can also affect the amount of gobbling. During slow or undesirable conditions, respond with conservative tactics to increase your chance of success.



Spring Hunting Setup

A setup will often make the difference between a successful hunt and an unsuccessful one. Here are spring setup steps to keep in mind.

CLOSE THE DISTANCE: Get as close as possible to the gobbler or a known turkey hangout location — about 100 yards depending on terrain and cover. As you ease to a setup, use locator calls to keep tabs on the bird's location.

PLAN AHEAD: Find a location to sit before making any turkey calls in case the gobbler comes in quickly.

AVOID OBSTACLES: Turkeys can sometimes be hesitant to cross obstacles. Avoid setting up with any barriers between you and the gobbler (creeks, old fences, etc.).

MAKE IT SAFE: Choose a tree that is wider than your shoulders and a spot where you can be seen by others. Wear blaze orange when moving.

SETTLE IN: Get a good seat to ensure you remain comfortable. Pack food and drink.

PLAN FOR THE SHOT: Keep your gun up and pointed in the direction you expect the gobbler to approach. Positively identify a legal turkey that is within range of your equipment and ensure the shot is safe before pulling the trigger.



Fall Turkey Hunting Strategy

Though far less popular than spring hunting in Missouri, fall turkey hunting can provide tremendous hunting opportunities at a beautiful time of year. Missouri has two fall turkey seasons — a firearms season and an archery season. Because the archery turkey season is largely an opportunistic season for deer hunters, this section will focus on the fall firearms season.

Although calls can still play a large role in a successful fall turkey hunt, the tactics and approaches used during the fall season differ appreciably from those used during spring. Unlike the spring season, where the harvest is largely restricted to male turkeys, any turkey can be harvested during the fall season. Instead of trying to lure in love-struck gobblers, during the fall season most hunters are trying to lure in brood flocks. Some fall hunters prefer to target gobblers, but most of the fall turkeys harvested in Missouri are hens and young-of-the-year birds.

Finding turkeys in the fall can sometimes be a challenge, particularly in heavily timbered areas. Focus on food and

typically you will find birds to pursue. Acorns are a preferred food source of turkeys, so mature oak forests are a great place to look for turkeys during fall. As you walk through the woods, look for turkey sign. If turkeys have been in the area, you will find where they've scratched through the leaves in search of acorns. Pay attention to the ground in the scratching. If it is dry, the scratching was likely made some time ago. If the ground is moist, it is likely that the birds are reasonably close by. In the more agricultural areas of the state, turkeys frequently feed in fields during fall. Pay attention to these areas, and you'll likely find turkeys.

One of the most popular fall turkey hunting strategies involves locating a brood flock (usually consisting of one or more hens with young-of-the-year birds), scattering the birds, and then attempting to call one or more of the birds to within range. As you walk through the woods in search of a flock, give a series of yelps every 100 yards or so and listen for a response. If you hear a response, approach to within about 100 yards of the birds as you would in the spring and get set up.

Continue to use yelps, clucks, and purrs to lure the bird in. If this does not work, attempt to scatter the flock. To do this, walk in their direction quickly, but as quietly as possible — your goal is to get as close the birds as you can before they spot you. When you see the birds, lay your gun down and run towards the flock in attempt to scatter them in all directions.

After you scatter the birds, position yourself in the area where the birds were prior to being flushed and wait about 10 minutes or so before offering kee-kee-runs to imitate a young bird interested in reuniting with the flock. You can also mix in some assembly yelps to draw birds into range. Often you will hear members of the flock calling all around you from different directions. Face the closest bird and be ready for its approach.

If you couldn't scatter the birds well on your initial approach, and they all flew in the same direction, you stand a reduced chance of success. In this case, if you hear calling in the distance, and it seems most of the birds are in that location, you may need to approach the flock and attempt to scatter them again. Don't wait too long to flush the flock again. After being scattered once, brood flocks can reassemble quickly, and it can be difficult to locate them again.





AFTER THE HUNT

Post-Shot Plan

Excitement and adrenaline peak when we take a shot at a turkey. It's important to harness the excitement and ensure the next steps after the shot are carefully thought out and executed.

Focus on Firearm Safety

Always keep the muzzle of the firearm pointed in a safe direction. Maintain control of the gun the entire time and make sure the safety is reengaged after the shot. Depending on the shotgun action type, be aware of another shell sliding into the chamber — particularly for semi-automatic shotguns.

Prepare for a Follow-up Shot

In most cases, a follow-up shot will not be needed, but hunters will want to be prepared for one, just in case. It is our responsibility as hunters to ensure shots are ethical and allow for a clean harvest. After the initial shot is taken, watch the turkey's reaction. If the bird takes off running or flying, and the bird was positively hit on the first shot, shoot again.

Approach the Bird Carefully

Approach the turkey immediately. Walk to the bird while being prepared for a follow-up shot if needed. When you are confident the bird is dead, unload your firearm. Before touching the turkey, be prepared for the carcass to flop, sometimes aggressively. If you have harvested a gobbler, watch out for the spurs, which can be sharp and could puncture you if you are careless. It is best not to pick up the turkey until it has stopped flopping.

Following the Regulations

After a turkey is harvested, make certain the regulations are followed, particularly the tagging and checking procedures.

Notch It

Once you have determined the bird is dead, it is now time to notch your permit. If you have a paper permit, it will be marked with months on the side and dates on the top. Make a small notch by tearing the paper or using a knife to clearly show you have notched the permit for the month and date of harvest. If you don't have the permit printed, you can virtually notch your permit by using MDC's MO Hunting App. Once your permit has been notched, you can transport the turkey from the place of harvest.



Tag it if You Leave it

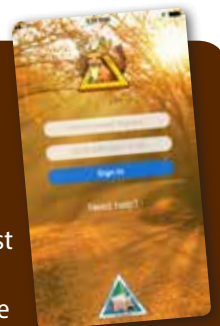
If you will not be in the immediate presence of your turkey at any time before Telechecking it, you will need to attach the notched permit to the bird. Put the notched permit inside of a sealable plastic bag and attach it to the bird's leg using zip ties, wire, or rope. If you're using the MO Hunting App and you leave the bird, you must attach a label to the turkey's leg that includes your full name, address, Telecheck confirmation number, and date of harvest.

Check It

All harvested turkeys are required to be Telechecked by 10 p.m. on the day of the harvest. You can complete the Telecheck process over the phone, on the internet, or through the MO Hunting App. If you're using a paper permit, make sure to write the confirmation number on the permit in the space provided. On the app, the confirmation number will be automatically uploaded to your account within 20 minutes of completing the Telecheck process.

Free MO Hunting App

Use your smartphone to purchase, view, and store annual hunting permits. You can even use it to notch your permit and Telecheck your harvest directly from your permit within the application. Get it in Android or iPhone platforms at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZoQ.





Preserving Memories of the Hunt

Photography

Quality photos will help retell the story of the hunt. Consider adding elements of the hunt into the photo. For example, you might include the call that you used or you might include the decoys in the background of the photograph. If you will be including your firearm in the photograph, make sure it is unloaded, the action is open, and the muzzle is pointed in a safe direction.

Taxidermy and Trophy Preparation

If you are having a full body mount done, the taxidermist will skin the bird and provide you with the meat. This will ensure the feathers remain in quality condition for a mount. Be extra careful with the feathers immediately after you harvest the bird and during transport to ensure a quality mount.

If you're not having a full body mount done, consider saving the beard, spurs, and tail fan as mementos. The tail and beard can be cut off easily with a knife. To remove the spurs, use a hacksaw to cut through the leg bone on either side of the spurs.

The fan should be spread out and pinned to cardboard or plastic foam. Sprinkle salt or borax on the fleshy part of the tail. Allow the fan to dry for several weeks and it will remain fanned out. Pour salt or borax on the fleshy end of the beard. Use a pipe cleaner, tooth pick, or small stick to remove the bone marrow from the portion of the leg bone that the spurs are attached to. You may also choose to use a knife to remove the tissue from the outside of the spur. The fan, in combination with the beard and spurs, makes an attractive display and many kits are available to assist with this process.

Transporting a Turkey

Turkey hunting vests or large, hunter-orange game bags specifically made for carrying wild turkeys can make the task of transporting your turkey easier and safer. Your goal during transport is to keep the carcass cool and clean with a plan to process the turkey as quickly as possible. In addition, always wear a hunter-orange cap and vest when carrying your harvested bird to your vehicle to avoid being mistaken for game by other hunters.



Processing a Turkey

Novice turkey hunters are often intimidated when it comes time to clean a turkey. As with chicken or other fowl, there are two basic ways to clean a turkey: skinning and plucking. Regardless of the method you choose, keep the meat clean and cool after harvesting the bird and process it as soon as possible.

Skinning

Skinning a turkey is faster and easier than plucking the bird, and is the most common way they are processed.

See the accompanying diagram for the steps in skinning a turkey.

Plucking

If you plan on cooking your turkey whole, then you will need to pluck the bird. Plucking simply involves pulling out the bird's feathers by hand to expose the skin. This method takes considerably longer than skinning and is used much less frequently.

Labeling

Label each package of turkey meat clearly with permanent marker. Make the letters large enough for easy reading. Labels must include the hunter's name, address, Telecheck confirmation number, and date taken. It is also a good idea to include the name of the meat portion (legs, breast, etc.), quantity, and packaging date.

Skinning a Turkey

1 Lay the bird on its back. Find the top of the breast bone, or keel, and make a small incision through the skin. Grab the skin on the bird near the incision and pull it off both breasts.



2 Run your knife along the keel on each side to remove both breasts.



3 Continue to pull the skin until the thigh meat is exposed. Cut the entire leg/thigh from the bird at the joint where the upper leg bone meets the body.



4 Remove the remaining skin from the leg and thigh. Repeat the process for the other leg and thigh.



5 Properly dispose of the carcass, entrails, and feathers.

6 If not cooking immediately, freeze the meal-sized portions in freezer safe bags.





Preparing and Cooking Turkey

After the turkey is processed, you're ready to cook. Many recipes that work for domestic turkey and chicken, particularly the breast meat, will work well for wild turkey.

Turkey Breast Recipes

Turkey breasts are coveted for their richness in flavor and versatility. They are simple to prepare with any number of recipes. If a recipe calls for cutting the breast into strips, always cut against the grain to maximize tenderness.

Turkey Fingers

Combine 1 cup dry bread-crumbs, ¼ cup Parmesan cheese, 1 tablespoon fresh parsley (or 1 teaspoon thyme or oregano), 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper. Whisk one large egg. Coat the turkey with flour. Dip in egg, then roll in breadcrumb mixture. Pan fry in a small amount of butter or olive oil until lightly brown, 2–3 minutes on each side.

Grilled Turkey

For a light meat to serve with salads or in burritos, marinate ½- to 1-inch thick strips of turkey in prepared Italian salad dressing or your favorite marinade. Refrigerate in marinade for 1–6 hours, then grill until done.

Turkey Jalapeno Poppers

A summer-time favorite, turkey poppers are a delicious grilled treat. Begin by soaking about 40 tooth picks in water for several hours. Cut one turkey breast into one-inch cubes.

Marinate the breast meat in Italian dressing for several hours. Next, cut about 20 jalapeno peppers in half and remove the seeds. Coat the inside of each pepper half with cream cheese. Then place a cube of turkey meat in each pepper half and wrap the pepper and turkey meat in half a strip of bacon and secure with a toothpick. Grill the poppers until the bacon is cooked thoroughly. About 1–2 minutes prior to removing from the grill, coat the poppers in a mixture of 50 percent barbecue sauce and 50 percent real maple syrup, allowing the mixture to form a glaze over the popper. Remove the poppers from the grill when done and allow them to cool a bit. Serve warm.

Turkey Leg and Thigh Recipes

It is very unfortunate, but many hunters save only the breast meat from the turkeys they harvest. Although they require different preparation than the breasts, turkey legs and thighs provide delicious meat. Following simple slow cooker preparation, there are many ways to prepare legs and thighs.

Split the leg from each thigh and place both on the bottom of a slow cooker. Cover the legs and thighs with 3½ cups of cream of chicken soup and 3½ cups of milk. Add water until the meat is covered. Cook on high for 8 hours or until meat is tender and pulls easily from the bones and tendons. Remove meat from the slow cooker, cool, and pull all the meat from the bones. Chunk or shred the meat and prepare using one of the following methods.

Turkey Legs and Gravy

Simply serve the leg and thigh meat with brown gravy, mashed potatoes, and a vegetable.



Turkey Noodle Soup

Cook 1 cup of chopped carrots, ½ cup of diced onion, and 2 cloves of finely chopped garlic in 1 tablespoon of olive oil for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Mix in 2 cups of wild turkey leg and thigh meat, 2 cups of uncooked egg noodles, 5¼ cups of chicken broth, ¼ teaspoon pepper, 1 tablespoon parsley, and 1 dried bay leaf.



Barbecued Turkey and Cheese Sandwiches

Shred leg and thigh meat and mix with your favorite barbecue sauce. Place the meat on bread slices with a layer of pimento cheese spread. Butter the bread and grill the sandwiches until golden brown on both sides.



Other Ways to Use Turkey Legs and Thighs

In addition to the recipes mentioned above, leg and thigh meat that has been prepared in a slow cooker can be used in just about any recipe or dish that requires ground or cubed meat. Turkey pot pie, chili, and gumbo are just a few of the dishes to which wild turkey makes a very nice addition.

Recognizing Record Turkeys

Think you have a record turkey? Here is the process to see how your turkey measures up.

- Weigh the gobbler, in pounds and ounces on a calibrated scale.
- Measure each spur along the outside center edge where the spur protrudes from the leg to the tip.
- Measure the beard beginning at the center point of the protrusion from the skin to the tip.
- Add the weight, 10 times each spur length and two times the beard length(s) to get the score of your turkey.
- Check your score at www.nwtf.org/hunt/records/score and find additional turkey records information.



Turkey Certificates

Is this turkey your first turkey? Then check out MDC's "First Turkey Certificates" for first-time successful hunters and kids at short.mdc.mo.gov/Z35.

Pattern Your Shotgun for Turkey Hunting



TURKEY ILLUSTRATION BY MARK RATHIER; TURKEY X-RAY COURTESY OF GREGORY T. BOYER, DVM



Shotgun: _____

Choke: _____

Shot size and type: _____

Shell length: _____

Shot weight (oz.): _____

Distance to target: _____

Pattern Your Shotgun for Turkey Hunting

Missouri offers some of the best turkey hunting in the nation. Get season dates, regulations, permit information, and tips for safe, successful turkey hunting at **short.mdc.mo.gov/ZZy**.

Before heading afield, be sure to test your shotgun, choke, and ammunition combination by patterning your shotgun.

- Stay safe. Always point your firearm in a safe direction and wear eye and ear protection.
- Shoot only on an approved shotgun shooting range with an appropriate backstop. Find ranges at **mdc.mo.gov/shootingranges**.
- The safe and ethical range at which to shoot a turkey depends on your shooting skill and the limitations of your ammunition. At a maximum, shots should be restricted to 40 yards or less.
- Aim at the turkey's wattles (marked with a black dot on the target).
- To cleanly harvest a turkey, you will need at least four pellets in the vital area (marked in white on the target). Missouri regulations allow for No. 4 size shot and smaller. Smaller shot sizes allow for more pellets in the shell, but less kinetic energy is achieved. Larger shot sizes allow for more kinetic energy but fewer pellets in the shell.
- Repeat the patterning process any time you change shotguns, chokes, shooting distance, or ammunition (shell length, shot charge, powder charge, etc.).
- Keep a detailed logbook of patterning results for future reference.

Interested in learning more?

The Conservation Department offers many programs, including programs on shotgun patterning. Visit **mdc.mo.gov/outdoorskills** for more information.

As hunters, we have legal requirements and ethical expectations to abide by. Properly testing equipment will increase harvest opportunities and reduce the likelihood of wounding a bird.

**Good luck
and stay
safe.**



Missouri Department of Conservation

Central Region

3500 E. Gans Road
Columbia, MO 65201
573-815-7900

Kansas City Region

12405 SE Ranson Road
Lee's Summit, MO 64082
816-622-0900

Northeast Region

3500 S. Baltimore
Kirksville, MO 63501
660-785-2420

Northwest Region

701 James McCarthy Drive
St. Joseph, MO 64507
816-271-3100

Ozark Region

551 Joe Jones Blvd.
West Plains, MO 65775
417-256-7161

Southeast Region

2302 County Park Drive
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701
573-290-5730

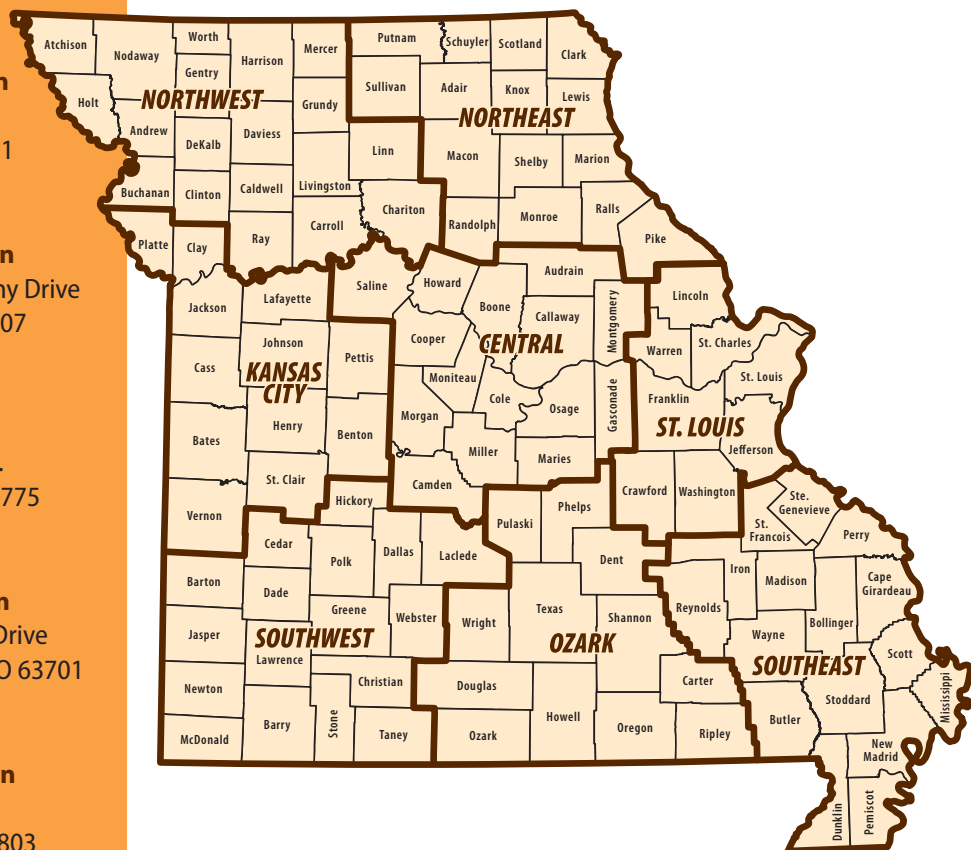
Southwest Region

2630 N. Mayfair
Springfield, MO 65803
417-895-6880

St. Louis Region

2360 Highway D
St. Charles, MO 63304
636-441-4554

MDC works with you and for you to sustain healthy forests, fish, and wildlife. If you have a conservation question, need help managing your property for wildlife, or would like to speak with your local conservation agent, call the nearest office listed in the sidebar to the left. For phone numbers and email addresses of MDC staff in your county, use the "Local Contact" feature at mdc.mo.gov.



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5/2018
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